

The Ohio State University Commencement  
March 16, 1962

President Fawcett, Members of the Board of Trustees, the Faculty, Members of the Graduating Class, Parents and Friends:

When President Fawcett wrote to me at Harvard last November inviting me to speak to you today, I had not yet assumed my responsibilities at Ohio University. I felt honored indeed to be asked "sight unseen" to give my first commencement address in Ohio at this distinguished, respected university.

In the two and one-half months I have been here, I have learned much about the educational institutions and the government of this great state. I must confess that I am sorely tempted today -- appearing in the State Capital before an influential audience and within earshot of the legislative body -- to speak about the financial problems of our educational institutions and the need to plan boldly and imaginatively for the decades ahead. Many commencement speakers succumb to this temptation to speak beyond the walls of the auditorium to legislators and newspaper editors. Others feel that they must address themselves to the faculty. But you in the graduating class are the people who will meet and solve the massive problems of this community, this state, the nation, and world. It is you to whom I should like to address my remarks today.

It is almost a truism to say that we are living in a world of rapidly accelerating change. There are now more people, more money, more resources than the world has ever known. But infinitely more important -- today we have more TIME than we have ever had before. With rapid developments in

medicine and new knowledge about life processes, many of you in this class may well live to be over 100 or 125 years of age. With developments in automation and data processing you may work a 25-hour week. Within a decade you will be able to fly from coast to coast faster than the change of time. You will have the unique sensation of seeing the sun set in the east behind you as you travel west. Your mail will arrive from Europe or the Far East by rocket carriers. In your homes and offices you will be waited on by robots. You may be able to communicate with each other by tiny devices imbedded in your back molars.

All of these developments will be designed to give you more TIME -- the most valuable commodity in the world. You have many more hours and years ahead of you than any people who have ever lived. The vital question is -- How are you planning to use this great wealth?

Less than twenty-two years ago a bright, earnest young man graduated from Harvard College. Today that man is President of the United States. A friend of his in the Class of 1940 at Harvard was heard to remark last year: "I was just as smart as Jack was, but Jack never stopped learning."

For some of you, today's commencement will mark the high point, the peak achievement in your lives. Others of you will continue to learn, to grow, and to develop your capabilities. What will make the difference between you and the person sitting next to you this morning?

Twenty-two years from now most of you will be as old as President Kennedy is today. Some of you will be leaders in education, in business, in government, or carrying on distinguished service in one of the professions. One of you may be the governor of this state or even the President of the United States. A few of you may have lost your way in life and have disappointed your parents, your friends, and yourselves. But all of you will have changed.



Henri Bergson in "Creative Evolution" said, "....our personality shoots, grows, and ripens without ceasing. Each of its moments is something new added to what was before....for a conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly."

All of us, I believe, are willing to accept Bergson's thesis that change is a fundamental law of life. Change is inevitable. But yet until some person reminds us, we cannot fully comprehend how much we change and how much our environment changes. A moment ago I asked you to look ahead twenty-two years. Let's now look back the same number of years to 1940, the year in which John Kennedy graduated from college and the year in which many of you were born.

The headlines in the New York Times of March 16, 1940, announced that Russia had signed a peace treaty with Finland, ending the Finnish-Russian War, and that Russian military bases had been established in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, countries which are now no more than quaint historical names. The American Federal Economy League feared the consequences of our mounting national debt which totalled \$48 million. The Rural Electrification Administration boasted that the number of farms in the United States receiving electrical service had risen from 10 per cent in 1935 to 22 per cent in 1940. The Klu Klux Klan flogged to death a man in Atlanta who encouraged labor unions to consider moving south. Bruce Barton, a successful advertising executive, told a Columbia University convocation about his first job which gave him \$3 a week. He described modern education and counselled that "Greek, Latin, and mathematics should be studied for the mental training necessary for a successful career in any field."

Red China, East Germany, and dozens of nations in Africa did not exist. Missiles, rockets, and space vehicles were no more than fanciful ideas in

"Buck Rogers" cartoons. Had some person predicted that a human being would be orbited around the earth in 1962 or that we would land a man on the moon by 1970, he would have been labelled a dreamy visionary. Atomic and hydrogen bombs had not been developed nor had commercial jet planes been flown. Who could have predicted that in 1962 millions of Americans would be watching television every evening while man-made satellites roamed the skies above?

In the years ahead the world will continue to change at an even more rapidly accelerating rate. It took almost 2000 years in the recorded history of man to reach speeds of 100 miles per hour, but within the past ten years we have gone from speeds of 500 to 18,000 miles per hour. It is not inconceivable that by 1970 we shall reach speeds of 180,000 miles per hour in interplanetary travel.

You will change, adapt, and accommodate yourselves as the world changes. Those of you who will lead our society will have the responsibility for giving direction to change, for making change purposeful. Change means growth into new areas of thought and development of new interests and associations. It also means abandoning outworn ideas and habits. Like the skillful librarian we are constantly making new acquisitions and discarding old collections. As we develop more and more talent and responsibility, we may even have to sacrifice valuable parts of ourselves.

Commencement speakers for generations have warned that the problems of the future are more complex and difficult than any experienced in the past. As man has developed his creative powers, as peoples of the world have become increasingly interdependent, and as the limits of human capacity for good and evil have expanded, this perennial forecast has been justified. Unquestionably such a prediction is appropriate today.



The technological developments of the past two decades and the incredible advances predicted for the next twenty years will alter substantially our daily pattern of living. New knowledge in all fields of study and in all professions is piling up at an enormous rate, causing major reappraisals of educational programs in all substantive areas. A high school graduate today must read about fifty times as much material as the high school graduate of the early 1900's. Tomorrow's leaders in most occupations will have supplemented their college work with graduate level education.

Competition among the three major powers of the world -- each determined to influence uncommitted or newly created nations -- will accelerate the process of change. "Sputnik" stimulated a concern for American education, a critical re-examination of educational institutions at all levels. Americans have responded in a way typical of us in all major crises.

In the jet plane world, Americans from a wide range of economic levels will travel to the Far East, Africa, and Latin America in numbers comparable to those going to Europe now. Federal funds and private foundation grants will continue to stimulate cultural exchanges and travel by scholars, technical experts, and students. More and more Americans will climb out of isolated crevices to learn foreign languages and to read widely about other cultures and customs.

When threatened by belligerent powers or shocked by sudden attack, we mobilize ourselves almost instantaneously. But when events are less dramatic, we sometimes respond inappropriately -- if at all. Take, for example, the fantastic population growth of the world. Few of us give it much attention, but yet this change may affect our lives more dramatically than any other phenomenon. The world population is increasing at the rate of 50 million people per year -- 137,000 every day. While I am speaking to you for twenty

minutes, almost 3,000 babies will be born. Four out of every five of them will be non-white and non-western. Within three and one-half days enough new people will be born to populate a city the size of Columbus.

Perhaps the most disturbing factor in this growth projection is that two-thirds of the people in the world do not have enough to eat. The per capita annual income in Africa is \$75....in Asia \$50....and in Latin America it is \$170. This compares to our per capita income of \$2300 per year. Merely to maintain the present low-level of living with its expanding population, Asia must increase its aggregate product by 60 per cent in the next 25 years. To raise itself to a European level of subsistence, Asia must increase its income 12-fold in this period of time.

How long will the hungry people of the world be patient with this situation? As we look at Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the answer is obviously "not long at all." Have we underestimated the human capabilities of these people -- for good and evil -- and have we over-estimated their willingness to remain in their present situation? Russian and Red Chinese leaders know that these conditions exist as well as we do, and they are determined to exploit this imbalance.

What can we do to meet these challenges of the next few decades -- to prevent the free world from being nibbled away until it disappears? To state the question another way -- ten or twenty years from now, what will we wish we had done today? In the world today, we cannot afford to be taken by surprise as often as we have been in the past.

Clearly we must be better informed. This means for each of us a life-long process of education and re-education. We need to develop an attitude that "Commencement Day" means literally the beginning of a never-ending process of education.



Our military services have long recognized the need for continuing education through war colleges and special institutes for officers. Medical doctors have kept up with new developments in medicine and surgery through informal and formal educational programs. More than sixty universities in America offer Advanced Management Programs for mature business executives; the IBM Corporation alone spends \$45 million each year on employee educational programs. Increasing numbers of colleges and universities are offering short liberal arts programs for alumni years out of college. We have yet to see the great impact on America of a widespread educational television network. All major institutions in our society will concern themselves increasingly with programs of continuing education.

But in the final analysis it is the responsibility of each individual for his own development and growth. Why do so many speakers proclaim that commencement is the beginning of education? Why have I talked to you about "Jack" and about his Harvard classmate who was "just as smart as Jack was" but he stopped learning?

It is because we have seen so many people who have stopped growing.... who have lost the ability to use their minds as precision instruments. They level off the day after graduation, and one never hears of them again. Routine habits comprise their day-to-day behavior -- what they read, what they watch on television, what they do with their time. They chum around with the same old crowd, and their lives follow the same shallow but well-worn ruts.

Yet there are others who by hard work, study, and sacrifice achieve for themselves the ultimate happiness of self-fulfillment. They have "an inner drive, a curiosity, a seeking and exploring element in their personalities."<sup>1</sup> They continue their vital movement throughout their lives.

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<sup>1</sup>John W. Gardner, "Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?"

Their minds are alive with the thrill of accomplishment. Their souls soar with the feeling that they are being creative and that life has meaning.

There is a secret satisfaction in being able to take responsibility. If any group, any organization, any society, or any nation is to move ahead, someone has to take responsibility. Some individual must make the difficult decisions. That person must be willing to carry the burden of responsibility and its attendant worries. He must face harsh judgments, criticism, envy, and occasional bitter disappointments. Yet the rewards of leadership inevitably make the efforts and sacrifice seem worthwhile. Knowledge that one has the inner strength and courage to effect change where change is necessary brings its own unique satisfaction and happiness. Such is the privilege and prestige of leadership.

Some of you may recall Robert Frost's well-known poem, "The Road Not Taken." Mr. Frost concludes with the refrain:

"I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference."

As never before, America needs men and women who are willing to travel the less-travelled path.....who are willing to work, to take great risks, to make decisions, to continue to study, to grow, and "to create themselves endlessly." This road can be difficult. It is strewn with obstacles, with detours, with danger.....and it can be very lonely. But this is the road you have all prepared yourselves for. I hope that many of you will have the courage to choose it and to stay with it.